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ABSTRACT

This special issue of "Media & Values" gives a perspective on how news is changing, what is missing in the news, and how to spot bias and misinformation in news coverage, both print and electronic. Articles examine the impact of computer imaging on the credibility of photographs and the issue of privacy--just how far should journalists go to get a story? In the vital area of news, what is real is too often shaped by reporters and correspondents who rarely are allowed the luxury of depth. Or, more likely, news is shaped by news executives who value ratings and sales more than the public trust. Articles in this issue include: (1) "Whatever Happened to the News?" (Daniel Hallin); (2) "Satisfying an Age-Old Appetite"; (3) "Balance Bias with Critical Questions" (Pat Hynds); (4) "Project Censored Exposes Media's Untold Stories"; (5) "Left/Right/Center" (Jeff Cohen); (6) "Making the News Pay" (Jeff Greenfield); (7) "Touching Up Reality" (Bennett Daviss); and (8) "The News at Any Cost" (Tom Goldstein). (EH)

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Media&Values

A Quarterly Resource for Media Awareness

Spring 1990

Number 50

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Elizabeth Thoman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

NEWS FOR THE '90s:

A Question of Values

ED 408 201

SO 026 730

What's Missing in the News? *p. 5*

Touching Up Reality *p. 10*

How to Analyze a News Story *p. 21*

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Media&Values

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Media&Values is published quarterly by the Center for Media and Values, an educational not-for-profit membership organization created to stimulate creative and critical thinking and positive action about the influence and impact of television and mass media in contemporary life.

Media&Values is the cornerstone of a pioneering media awareness education movement to promote better understanding of how today's mass media environment influences individual and social values — personal attitudes and social behaviors as well as cultural, economic and political worldviews. *Media&Values* believes that a concern for values in today's media age is not so much knowing all the answers as asking the right questions. Working in collaboration with educational leaders, youth and family-serving organizations, religious denominations and academic researchers, the Center's goal is to empower families and individuals to learn what questions to ask and thus become more selective and knowledgeable consumers of today's mass media products.

In addition to publishing *Media&Values*, the Center creates educational resource materials for local use, organizes forums and conferences, and maintains an information and resource center on the media issues of our time. Funding for the Center comes from subscriptions and memberships along with individual donations, foundation grants and organizational co-sponsorships.

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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE NEWS?

When hard news goes soft, entertainment takes over

By Daniel Hallin

News has always mixed the serious and the entertaining. The tension between journalism and commercialism goes back long before television, but it is felt with special intensity in television news today. In the early 1960s the networks, hugely profitable but worried about their images and about regulatory pressures, expanded their news operations and largely freed them from the pressures of commercial television. The "church" of news was to be separated from the "state" of entertainment.

In the 1970s and '80s, however, the barrier between news and entertainment has been increasingly eroded. Not all the changes of these years have been for the worse. But taken together, they raise serious questions about the future of journalism in an entertainment-dominated medium. A recent edition of the news "tabloid" *A Current Affair*, for example, ended with the "tease," "Coming up — sex, murder and videotape, that's next!" It may be that this is indeed the future of television news.

It was the local stations that first discovered, late in the 1960s, that news could make money — lots of money. By the end of the '70s, news was frequently producing 60 percent of a station's profits. With numbers like that, news was much "too important" to leave to journalists, and a heavily entertainment-oriented form of programming began to evolve. Often it was contrasted directly with the network news. "Feel like you're getting a bad deal from poker-faced TV news reporters?" asked San Francisco's KGO in one ad. "Then let the Channel 7 Gang deal you in. They're not afraid to be friendly."

Competitive pressures began to impinge on network news in a serious way in the late 1970s. In 1976 ABC began a successful drive to make its news division competitive with CBS and NBC. Its successful move into news was followed by the growth of cable, which began to erode the networks' audience share. As outlined more fully elsewhere in this issue, this new source of competition, combined with other economic conditions, put a significant squeeze on network profits that has since come home to the news divisions in the form of an unprecedented concern with the bottom line.

Free-Market Journalism

In Washington, meanwhile, the FCC was dismantling most of the regulatory framework that had been imposed on the television industry since its beginnings, especially the obligation — vague, to be sure — to provide some minimum of serious public affairs programming.

Proponents of deregulation assumed that the free market would bring forth an age of diversity in television programming. In fact, there is a lot more news on television now than ever before. In a sense, there is also greater diversity. The last few years have seen a proliferation of new forms of "reality-based programming."

If we set aside live programming and the Sunday interview shows, there were basically only two forms of public affairs television in the 1960s: the evening news

and the documentary. In the '70s new forms appeared: the news magazine, represented first by *60 Minutes*, and local news in its modern, fast-paced "happy talk" form. Each breached the barrier between news and entertainment in important ways. The decade also saw the consolidation of morning news as a strongly entertainment-oriented form of programming. NBC's *Today* show had pioneered such a form in the 1950s. In the '70s, ABC joined the field with *Good Morning America*, produced by the entertainment division, and CBS abandoned hard news in the morning to try and imitate *Today*.

The 1980s gave us two significant additions to public affairs programming, *Nightline* and CNN. The latter, it might be added, is itself a complex mix of the serious and the trivial. CNN has taken up slack from the established networks in live public affairs programming, covering, for example, much of the Iran-Contra hearings ABC, CBS and NBC declined to carry and providing electrifying live coverage of the massacre at Tiananmen Square. But day in and day out, CNN news offerings resemble local news more than anything else, mixing short reports on political affairs with large doses of weather and human interest.

The '80s also saw a proliferation of *60 Minutes* imitators, often with a particularly fast-paced, glitzy style. And they have seen the demise of one important form of public affairs programming: the documentary. More than any other public affairs programming, the documentary unit *CBS Reports*, established in that period in the early '60s when the networks were moving to head off regulatory pressures, stood apart from commercial constraints. The works produced — "Harvest of Shame," for instance, or "The Selling of the Pentagon" — were hour-long statements about serious issues. Often a year or more in production and featuring a clear point of view, they provided a unique perspective on many problems, policies and controversial issues. Thanks to corporate scruples and bottom-line consciousness, their day in commercial television is definitely over.

Most of today's growth, meanwhile, has been at the "low end" in a proliferation of shows that practice what might be called "parajournalism." The most important new form is the "tabloid" news magazine, including such shows as *A Current Affair, Inside Edition, Hard Copy* and *The Reporters*.

In a way, these shows represent something very new. They are not news shows that borrow conventions from entertainment television, but the other way around — entertainment programs that borrow the aura of news. The forms and the "look" are news — the opening sequences frequently feature typewriter keys and newsroom-like sets with monitors in the background. The content, however, has little of the substance of journalism; above all, little about public affairs.

In another sense, these shows are nothing new at all. What they have done is to take the approach pioneered by the hybrid forms of the 1970s and push it to extremes. Local news is typically concerned with crime, accidents and disasters, children lost and found and new animals born at zoos; morning news with celebrities, health and "life styles." What all these stories have in common is that they are about everyday life — and about its disruptions and exaltations (crime, illness, the hero, the celebrity, the rescue). They are about private, not public, life. The "softer" news shows have always traded heavily in this kind of material. But they have mixed it with a measure of genuine journalism. Their origins in the older tradition of public affairs reporting have also imposed some limits on what they will stoop to in the way of sensationalism.

With the new "tabloids" these scruples are mostly out the window. Their appeal is to the emotions, with no apologies; their interest in public affairs is not quite nil but very close (issues with sufficient emotional content, like crime and AIDS, can still bring it out). They have had great success with this model, and the rest of television news is sure to be sorely tempted to compete with them.

In the long run, there is reason for concern not only about the quality of the evening news, but even its survival.

New Agenda

The main vehicle for serious public affairs coverage, meanwhile, remains the network evening news, which is widely seen as having betrayed the values of the so-called Golden Age of Cronkite, Huntley and Brinkley. This view is not entirely accurate: like many "golden" ages, television's early years have been very much romanticized.

In many ways the evening news is better now than it was in the '60s and early '70s. There is nothing wrong with learning to use the medium effectively. The truth is that much of television news 15 or 20 years ago was both dull and difficult to understand. There is nothing wrong, either, with shifting the news agenda toward the kinds of stories more meaningful to the average audience member. If television does more stories about health or child care, up to a point that's a change for the better.

But the drive for ratings has produced many troubling practices, from the furious pace of modern news to a tendency for journalists to scramble like politicians onto the bandwagon of the latest wave of popular sentiment. In the mid-1980s the fashionable emotion was patriotism. Today it is often the evils of drugs. Poker-faced objectivity gives way to breathless moralism, as long as the issue is safe . The danger is both that passion will be inflated at the expense of understanding and tha the public agenda will be distorted, with

The Birth of the "Sound Bite"

"One of the most dramatic changes in television reporting has to do with the way statements by the president and other top administration officials are handled. Until the early '70s, it was common for the White House correspondent simply to introduce a presidential statement with a brief summary and then to show the president's remarks unedited, often for two minutes or more.

Today TV reporters routinely cut an official's remarks into 10- or 15-second sound bites, then weave these into their own narration. It is the journalist, not the official, who speaks to the news audience."

— Daniel Hallin,
We Keep America on Top of the World

emotional issues blown up larger than life and less dramatic but equally serious ones diminished.

In the long run, there is reason for concern not only about the quality of the evening news, but even its survival. The networks expanded news programs to 30 minutes to begin with, and affiliate stations carried them, not because it was profitable but because they were a regulated industry and wanted the prestige of belonging to the Fourth Estate. But the regulatory pressure is gone now, and the temptation for local stations to drop the network news is increased by the fact that technology has made it possible for local stations to cover many of the national and international events the networks have covered, albeit usually in a sporadic and superficial way. Technology can transfer pictures from Panama or Eastern Europe quickly and cheaply, while understanding of their context is harder to come by.

Even now the amount of time American television devotes to the affairs of public life is tiny. Most industrialized countries, for instance, have at least a full half-hour of national news in prime time; the United States has 22-23 minutes (the length of an evening news broadcast when commercials are eliminated) in "early fringe" time, with even the slots at 6 or 6:30 p.m. increasingly going to game shows and tabloids. Some form of serious television journalism will surely survive. But it could well be reduced to serving a specialized audience, while most of the public watches nothing but the softest form of "infotainment." With most of the public getting its news from television already and newspaper readership declining, the danger of creating a public that knows and cares little about public life is very real.

Daniel C. Hallin is associate professor of communication at the University of California/San Diego. He is author of The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam, *and many other articles on news and public life. Li-Yun Weng is an art student at California State University/L.A.*

SENSATIONAL REPORTING SATISFIES AN AGE-OLD APPETITE

By Mitchell Stephens

Rather than some relatively recent craze, stimulated by the arrival of satellites, television or even the newspaper, the good news is that the frenzied, obsessive exchange of news is one of the oldest human activities.

Messengers were appointed to bring word, criers to proclaim it and busybodies to spread the word. The need to know helped attract people to crossroads, campfires and market places; it helped motivate journeyers; it helps explain the reception accorded travelers. In most parts of the preliterate world the first question asked of a traveler was, as it was in Outer Mongolia in 1921, "What's new?" These preliterate peoples were probably better informed about events in their immediate neighborhood than are most modern, urban or suburban Americans.

A similar fascination with news was evident in the Greek agora and later in the Roman Forum, where to the hubbub of spoken news was added information from daily handwritten news sheets, first posted by Julius Caesar.

The bad news is that two of the subjects humans have most wanted to keep up with are sex and violence.

The Nootka of Vancouver island, for example, would exchange plenty of important news — on fishing, on the chief's activities, on plans for war. But they also pricked up their ears at word that someone was having an affair. And the tale of a suitor who tumbled into a barrel of rainwater while sneaking out the window of his lover's house "spread," according to an anthropologist, "like wildfire up and down the coast."

Through the centuries societies have been sustained by the news they share.

There is more bad news. The golden age of political coverage that journalism critics pine over — the era when reporters concentrated on the "real" issues — turns out to have been as mythical as the golden age of politics. In those rare historical moments when politicians deigned to face major problems and condescended to allow journalists to comment on them, those comments tended to be wildly subjective, as when the founders of our free press called their pro-British compatriots "diabolical Tools of Tyrants" and "men totally abandoned to wickedness." Samuel Johnson — writing in a era when thinkers like Joseph Addison, Daniel Defoe and Jonathon Swift dominated British periodicals — concluded that the press "affords sufficient information to elate vanity, and stiffen obstinacy, but too little to enlarge the mind" So much for that golden age.

Yes, journalism has changed. For the better: our ancestors complained that they had "no data by which (to) correctly reason" about events overseas; we often seem to have, if anything, too much data. And for the worse: it is difficult to imagine brilliant, progressive eccentrics like Horace Greeley or Joseph Pulitzer working their way to the top of the huge corporations that have taken over almost all U.S. news organizations in the 20th Century.

Much doesn't change. It is foolish to pretend that sensationalism and superficiality could simply be expunged from the news if only Geraldo Rivera or Rupert Murdoch disappeared. Nevertheless, we can still protest when the news gets too irrelevant, too shallow. We can better educate audiences about its limitations and encourage viewers to change the channel. The desire to keep up with the news seems basic to our species, but that too does not mean that in learning about the world we have to limit ourselves to satisfying that desire.

Mitchell Stephens is an associate professor of journalism at New York University. He is the author of A History of News.

Balance Bias with Critical Questions

By Patricia Hynds

When I read the daily newspaper or watch the evening news, what is missing often upsets me as much as what is there. What is missing frequently seems to be the truth.

Of course, as the Chinese proverb frequently quoted by the late Latin American journalist, Penny Lernoux, says, "There is your truth, there is my truth and there is the truth."

Most of us are convinced that "my truth" is "the truth." But as we move into the '90s, more and more sophisticated news management techniques will be used to convince us that someone else's "truth" should be ours. After living in Latin America most of the past nine years, I am convinced that there is a great deal of untruth, some of it deliberate, in what is presented in U.S. media about the rest of the world and even about domestic issues.

The struggle to appear balanced can obscure "the truth."

However, with a little practice, you can learn to recognize the subjective underpinnings of a story.

One important point to remember is that objective reporting is a myth. Every reporter brings to the story his/her own biases and world view. Each reporter has to make choices in writing the story: what to include, what to leave out, what sources to use. A few well-placed adjectives, a few uses of "alleged" or "so- called" can cast a definite ideological twist.

Two reporters can see the same event very differently. I experienced this in a dramatic way when the pope visited Nicaragua in 1983. While many U.S. reporters, especially those arriving and departing with the pope, saw crowds "jeering and heckling" the pontiff, others saw a very different reality — poor Nicaraguans concerned at the continuing loss of their loved ones in the contra war and frustrated at what they felt was the Holy Father's refusal to respond to their pain.

The struggle to appear balanced can obscure "the truth," and it often rests on shaky assumptions. One is the principle that if two perspectives are totally opposed, the truth must lie somewhere in the middle. Another principle stresses that the media must never appear one-sided. Thus, much violence in Third World countries and elsewhere is presented as innocent civilians caught in the crossfire between two equally repugnant forces — even in the face of clear evidence of greater levels of abuse by one side.

Another version of the distorted idea of balance requires that every quote that contradicts previous norms, assumptions

An Issue Forum

— or U.S. policies — must be countered by a quote from the administration or a "Western diplomat" or "high official source." This appearance of balance usually leaves the reader hopelessly lost.

Journalists are supposed to gather, weigh, organize and evaluate information— not just put on pictures.

Bill Moyers

The effort to appear objective frequently results in just the opposite, a weighted coverage favoring the current political "party line," or at least not challenging the conventional perspective. Even in domestic coverage , reliance on official sources and the distorting effect of prejudices and fears can lead to the kind of injustice that occurred in late 1989 when William Bennett, a black, was arrested for a murder apparently committed by the white Charles Stuart. Stuart used fears about minority crime to avoid suspicion for the murder of his wife. The Boston media's dependence on police sources and automatic assumptions about racial tensions helped create a false picture.

Varied Views

Many factors impede the transmission of accurate information, including changes taking place in the media itself, from more and more outlets owned by fewer and fewer corporations/conglomerates to TV coverage that focuses on the 30-second sound bite instead of description or analysis. In newspaper coverage, superficial, but very popular treatments such as the headline format developed by *USA Today*, work against critical analysis that could challenge official propaganda.

Also, reporters increase their access to sources when they write material that meets source approval, and lose it when they challenge the assumptions of those sources.

Learn more about detecting bias in the news. See our guidelines, pages 21–22.

Less and less often do major networks or newspapers, let alone local media, station correspondents overseas for any length of time. So when an international story breaks, reporters fly in with no background on the issue, often without speaking the language or understanding anything of the area's history or culture. The result is a too-easy reliance on "official" sources.

The missing voices of activists and grass roots sources are a cause for great concern even when establishment bias is unintentional. But reporters' dependence on authorities makes them—and by extension media consumers—particularly vulnerable to deliberate attempts to mislead by governments and agencies. A case in point was the Office of Public Diplomacy, set up in the State Department during the Reagan administration to drum up support for the contras. Supervised by Oliver North, press releases were created that deliberately put out false information. In point of fact, reporters should consider the axes being ground by any government office of information, but all too often their accounts are taken at face value.

American volunteer workers affiliated with various churches are a neutral force in South and Central America today. They have a more compelling story to tell than does Washington.

L. S. Clemens

Reading Between the Lines

Judging the accuracy of what we read, see or hear in the media is not easy. However, it is possible to ask critical questions, to help determine whether or not we are getting the whole story.

1. Who are the sources and what are their perspectives? How many are U.S. officials? How many are "unnamed?" How many are critics of U.S. policy? Be suspicious of accounts that come only from high officials and of any reports released during a military emergency. (Journalists were banned from Grenada until the U.S.invasion was over, and press pool reports were reviewed by the military during the invasion of Panama.) But more subtle influences occur all the time — for example, are foreign "person on the street" interviews only with those who are well-educated or who speak English well?

2. Are significant questions left unasked or unanswered? Is the political, social, economic or historical context missing? This is especially important in the early coverage of a breaking event. In the aftermath, many questions will be raised and criticisms made, but what will be remembered is what we first saw or heard. To the U.S. public, the event is an issue only as long as it is a headline or lead story. The fleeting appearances and disappearances of African famine from the news are one example. When coverage occurs, usually around a crisis situation, it seldom examines underlying social and political causes. If they are mentioned, the U.S. role in them is rarely questioned.

3. Do quotes seem abridged or out of context? The *New York Times* quoted U.S. church worker Jennifer Casolo, upon her release by the Salvadoran military, saying, "I don't think I suffered." According to *Newsday*, she said, "I don't think I have suffered as terribly as the thousands of Salvadorans have suffered here." Quite a difference.

4. Does coverage seem to offer a partial or selective history of events? References to returning Panama to "democracy" and to Eric Del Valle as the "last elected president of Panama" are a case in point. In

actuality, Del Valle was both instituted and removed from office by General Manuel Noriega. The last elected president of Panama was Nicolas Ardito Barletta. He was elected in May 1985, in elections — defended by the U.S. — that were so fraudulent he was referred to as "El Fraudito."

5. Are exaggerated or rhetorical claims reported uncritically without journalistic scrutiny? Loaded adjectives or phrases like "terrorist," "left-wing," "freedom fighters" (or President Ronald Reagan's "evil empire" remarks) should alert us to short-hand rhetoric that conveys an ideological point of view. One of the most overused and misused words in political coverage is "democracy." Democratic-style government can be organized in a variety of ways; the U.S. model is only one. We can be suspicious when the press repeats phrases over and over as if they held the same meaning for everyone.

6. What stories or events are not covered? For example, during the media's recent focus on Eastern Europe, Brazil's presidential elections passed virtually unnoticed, even though there are more Brazilians than Poles, Hungarians and Czechs put together. Many parts of the world are covered by U.S. media only if American troops are there, if the U.S. has major economic interests or if the administration is waging a propaganda offensive. It is a sad journalistic truism that many Third World countries only make the news if there are "coups or earthquakes."

No one can form an opinion from stories that are never covered. That's why alternative sources of news are so important. But the critical reader can learn to read between the lines of brief and biased accounts. Asking the right questions about what we see and hear is the first step toward making the informed political choices on which the freedom we value so highly depends.

Pat Hynds is a Maryknoll Lay Missioner. She worked at the Jesuit-directed Central American Historical Institute in Nicaragua for six years. Illustration by Mark Flores.

Project Censored Exposes Media's Untold Stories

By Kerry Skorlich

Question: What do George Bush's political secrets, the Environmental Protection Agency's role in covering up pollution and NASA's plans to launch 50 pounds of deadly plutonium into space have in common?

Answer: They are three of the top 10 under-reported news stories of 1988 identified by Project Censored at Sonoma State University in California. The brainchild of project director Carl Jensen, Ph.D., the research effort annually collects and publicizes the most significant examples of the media's self-censorship and failure to search out and widely report issues of major importance to society.

Jensen has spent more than 20 years inside the media as a journalist, advertising executive and publicist. He traces his desire to expose societal forms of self-censorship through Project Censored, now in its fourteenth year, back to the landslide re-election of Richard Nixon in 1972. The discovery of the Watergate burglaries was reported before the election, but it wasn't until a year later that the media finally exposed Nixon's involvement.

Jensen defines censorship as "the suppression of information, whether purposeful or not, by any method—including bias, omission, under-reporting, and self-censorship—which results in the systematic omission of information.

"While censorship in totalitarian societies is widely criticized in the United States, our own form of self-censorship may be even more dangerous because it is so subtle and rarely acknowledged."

Jensen launched Project Censored in 1976 as a response to this form of censorship, after comparisons of critical issues with press coverage convinced him that the media fail to provide citizens with all the information they need.

He cites many factors that, when combined, lead to the failure of the news media to fully inform the public, including:

- economic pressures to produce corporate profits, especially when a story may not be in the best financial interests of the stockholders, advertisers, or owners;
- control of the means of production by a handful of media corporations;
- questionable reliability of some sources;
- judgment that some stories are too complex for the general public;
- rejection of stories without identifiable beginnings, middles and endings;
- slighting of stories that lack acknowledgement by major news organizations or wire services.

Project Censored's Top 10

A unique national media research project at Sonoma State university in California, Project Censored, annually selects and publicizes under-reported news stories. Its 1988 "winners" define an ample field for further investigation.

- Secrets of President George Bush's 1988 campaign
- How the EPA Covers Up Pollution Stories
- Risking Nuclear Disaster with the Space Shuttle
- The Dangers of Food Irradiation
- U.S. Violates International Law
- Acid Rain: One of America's Biggest Killers
- America's Secret Police Network
- Children Die to Pay Third World Debt
- The Specter of a Constitutional Convention
- Abuse of Incarcerated Children

Jensen and his graduate assistants select 25 preliminary finalists from examples of censorship brought to their attention. They look for stories about highly significant subjects that are important to a majority of the public, with national and international impact. Obviously, they must have received minimal previous coverage.

A national panel of media scholars and journalists selects 10 "winners" each spring for the previous year.

Jensen sees the Reagan administration as the number one censor of the '80s. But in general he believes that failure to cover critical and controversial issues consistently and in depth is not the result of a media conspiracy.

"Supporting and encouraging a free, open and aggressive press is the real issue. The media have the power to stimulate people to clean up the environment, to force corrupt politicians out of office, to reduce poverty and create a truly equitable society. They can literally save the lives of millions of human beings." Like it or not, it is the media that determines which issues make the national agenda for discussion and action and which do not.

To nominate an overlooked news story, send a copy of the story, including source and date, to: Dr. Carl Jensen, director, Project Censored, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928.

Kerry Skorlich is assistant editor of Media&Values. *She is a student in the Master of Professional Writing Program at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.*

How the Journalistic Middle Ground Shapes the News

By Jeff Cohen

When mainstream journalists tell me during debates that "our news doesn't reflect bias of the left or right," I ask them whether they therefore admit to reflecting bias of center. They react as if I've uttered an absurdity: "Bias of the center! What's that?"

It is a strange concept to many in the media. They can accept conservatism or rightism as ideology that carries with it certain values and opinions, beliefs about the past, goals for the future. They can accept that leftism carries with it values, opinions, beliefs. But being in the center — being a centrist — is somehow not having an ideology at all. Somehow centrism in not an "ism" carrying with it values, beliefs or opinions.

When we talk of the journalistic center or middle-of-the-road news media, we mean network TV news, the *MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour*, "newspapers of record" such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and the dozens of dailies offering similar news, AP and UPI, *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc.

Center Moves

The journalistic center is not inert. It moves. It shifted slightly leftward in the mid-'70s in the wake of Watergate when reporters were allowed greater latitude for independent inquiry. In the '80s the journalistic center has veered strongly rightward.

The two main establishment papers — the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* — are the primary organs of the center, though editorially they've tilted rightward throughout the '80s. As soon as Reagan was inaugurated, both papers began promoting White House charges that the Soviets were the primary source of terrorism in the world. Both papers vehemently opposed the nuclear weapons test halt initiated by Gorbachev. The *Times* backed the neutron bomb. The *Times* also sided with Reagan against the Democratic party leadership in supporting military aid to the contras in 1986. Both papers consistently backed so-called "humanitarian aid" to the contras. On the home front, both papers increasingly opposed organized labor.

While you're busy weeding out propaganda of the left and the right, who's protecting us from the center?

The centrists in TV news have also been tilting rightward. FAIR's study of *Nightline*, perhaps TV's most influential news show, found a conservative slant toward "experts" from the white, male establishment. The left was generally excluded. *Nightline's* four most frequent guests were all Reagan sympathizers: Kissinger, Haig, Abrams and Falwell. *MacNeil/Lehrer's* guest list seems even more conservative and elite. According to the *Progressive*, co-anchor Jim Lehrer dislikes wasting time interviewing critics from peace or public interest groups, whom he refers to as "moaners" and "whiners."

Definitions and Clichés

If, for simplicity's sake, we define the left as seeking substantial reform toward a more equitable distribution of wealth and power and the right as seeking to undo social reform and regulation and favoring a free marketplace that allows wide disparities in wealth and power, then we can define the political center as seeking to preserve the status quo, tinkering with the system only very prudently.

How do these three positions play out journalistically? Unlike left-wing or right-wing publications which are often on the attack, centrist propaganda emphasizes system-supporting news. If scandals come

to light, centrist propaganda often focuses less on the scandal than on how well "the system works" in fixing it!

When it comes to foreign policy, centrist propaganda sometimes questions this or that tactic, but it never doubts that the goal of policy is anything other than promoting democracy, peace and human rights. Other countries may subvert, destabilize or support terrorism. The United States just wages peace.

For example, headlines about the Nicaraguan contras were often unjustifiably upbeat. On November 3, 1986, at a time when the Reagan White House was stressing the contras' new-found fighting ability (and after the *Times* had editorially endorsed contra aid) the *Times* ran this headline: "A Day's Toll Shows Contra's Ability to Strike." The article described nothing more than a contra attack on an agricultural co-op that killed the director and nine civilians, several of them children.

Outside Critics

Centrist propaganda can sometimes contain blunt social criticism — especially of someone's else's system. A July 1989 news story in the *New York Times* on political discontent in Japan carried this headline: "Trembling at the Top: Japan's Ruling Elite Faces a Fed-Up People." The *Times*, which has had little trouble in identifying a "ruling elite" in Japan, has never been able to discern such an elite in the United States in all its voluminous reporting on our politico-economic system. By the same standards, in the *Times*, "U.S. imperialism" is one of those dubious concepts that only appears between quote marks.

Media Monopoly

Is narrowing concentration of media ownership a grave problem in the United States? You wouldn't know it from the *New York Times*, which covered the Time/Warner merger as just another business story, hardly mentioning threats to pluralism and the First Amendment. Yet on April 4, 1989 a *Times* story on "Newspaper Deal in Italy Stirs Debate Over Press Freedom" cited complaints of Italian reporters that "concentration (of press owners) produces bland journalism, especially on economic matters and political issues close to their owners' hearts or pocketbooks."

Is there a wide disparity in living conditions between America's rich and America's poor — between, for example, those who own or manage America's coal mines and the miners who work in them? U.S. TV is obsessed with *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* but not in juxtaposing the wealth of the rich against the poverty of, say, Donald Trump's kitchen workers or Lawrence Tisch's field hands.

This didn't stop ABC's Rick Inderfurth who boldly took a *World News Tonight* film crew inside the ramshackle homes of striking coal miners and vividly contrasted them with the relative wealth of the mine managers. There's a catch: The report did not deal with conditions in Virginia but in the Soviet Union. The militant strike against the Pittston coal company in Virginia — occurring at the same time as the Soviet strike — has been sparsely covered; the evening network newscasts devoted 36 minutes to the Soviet miners in eight days, twice the coverage of the U.S. strike over four months. One wonders if a TV reporter doing the same video class analysis of the U.S. coal fields would have been fired for leftist bias.

Journalists are not unaware that the U.S. helped overthrow democratic governments, for example, in Guatemala in '54, Brazil in '64, Chile in '73, but these cases are considered ancient history and no longer relevant.

Mainstream journalists respond to such criticism by explaining that articles for the daily press are not history texts and cannot include everything. That's true, but centrist propaganda finds space for certain histories and not others. Many, if not most, of the reports on Hungary in the summer of 1989 traced human rights abuses to the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. By contrast, reports on Guatemala's current human rights situation rarely traced events to the U.S.-sponsored coup of 1954.

Perhaps the most graphic component of foreign policy coverage in centrist media is the inordinate number of (often unnamed) government sources: White House, State, Pentagon, U.S. Intelligence, etc. Some reporters act more like stenographers for those in power than journalists. When discussing these reporters, the phrase "centrist propaganda" misses the mark. "State propaganda" is a more apt description.

Jeff Cohen is Executive Director of Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR). This was adapted from his keynote speech to the Propaganda and Postmodernism conference sponsored by Propaganda Review, *San Francisco, August, 1989.*

What's FAIR?

Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) was started in 1986 by former publicists of environmental and peace groups to dispute the notion of the media's liberal bias. By working as a media participant and critic, executive director Jeff Cohen and other staff members advocate greater media pluralism and inclusion of left-of-center and nonestablishment values in debate on national issues. From this perspective, FAIR's monthly newsletter *EXTRA!* provides an informed and alternative analysis of news events reported in the mainstream press.

FAIR made the news in 1988 when its study of the *Nightline* guest list received wide coverage. The study revealed late-night public affairs programs' focus on while male experts as sources for too many stories, while women, minorities and experts with other viewpoints are ignored.

Subscriptions to *Extra!* are included in a basic FAIR membership of $30. Contact FAIR, 130 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10001, (212) 633-6700.

TOUCHING UP REALITY

New technologies shake old beliefs in news photography

By Bennett Daviss

In 1982, the respected *National Geographic* attracted controversy by moving one of Egypt's great pyramids.

Through the magic of computer-generated digital imaging, the pyramid moved, not in space, but on the *Geographic's* cover, where its apex was electronically shifted to make it into the magazine's yellow cover frame.

"The effect was the same as if the photographer had moved over a few feet," the *Geographic's* editor Wilbur Garrett wrote to a complaining reader after the *New York Times* reported the magazine's transgression.

How much did the use of a telephoto lens move the pyramids? Garrett asked. How much did the color change because of a filter? Were the camels there naturally or were they brought there for a picture?

Garrett's point — that reporting and photojournalism have always created their own views of reality — doesn't eliminate the radical shift digital image processing computers have made in the reality of today's news photography. Indeed, their almost magical abilities — to create effects, to correct mistakes and to save money — are fast making the machines indispensable in post-production shops. "At first, about 80 percent of the time our equipment was used for special effects," says Steve Mayer, chairman and chief technical officer of Digital FX in Mountain View, California. "Now, it's mainly used to touch up reality. An actor's hair is out of place or a product's label is blue instead of red. The president of a major corporation gave a speech which was taped, and part of his apparel wasn't zipped. That was fixed in the computer."

The machines can subtract as easily as they can add. In one case, a director had just spent $400,000 taping a candy commercial featuring a family and its cat. Suddenly, for legal reasons, the cat couldn't be used. Instead of reshooting the costly ad, the director turned the raw footage over to a computer. The cat simply disappeared from the finished commercial.

Technology's ability to change images into electronic information has destroyed the photograph as a reliable record of reality.

But the desire to add to or subtract from reality has also reached as far as the Reagan White House, which erased Oliver North from several official Oval Office photos before publicly releasing them.

In fact, although the television industry is using digital imaging technology routinely, almost no one has considered what it means now that pictures can lie as easily as words. "Once this new technology gets out there," says Thomas Wolzien, vice-president of editorial and production at NBC Television News, "we're going to have a hell of a time telling what's real and what's unreal." Adds David Zeltzer, a leading MIT researcher in computer animation, "What's going to happen to electronic newsgathering when the validating function of videotape no longer exists? Television will no longer be a verification medium. Who's going to control that?"

Magic Manipulator

Priced below $500,000 — not at all beyond the means of a successful studio or production lab — video-imaging computers are now regularly doing things that were too costly or technically impossible even three years ago. And this kind of manipulation is no longer even the exclusive province of the well-heeled specialty lab. Software recently released for the Apple Macintosh desktop computer gives almost anyone identical power over pictures.

Now, anyone from a spouse to a world leader can be "photographed" in places they never visited or in incidents that never took place. "After a divorce you can erase your ex-mother-in-law from all your family photos," Wolzien says. "You could formulate a picture of yourself addressing the United Nations General Assembly without ever leaving your den."

"What can be done to commercials and situation comedies can also be done to documentaries and news footage," Wolzien warns. "Video retouching could have kept the late Soviet General Secretary Chernenko looking alive forever, changing his clothes and surroundings. Working from existing videotape, a good video artist could make Chernenko visit with people who were photographed long after his death. Background from one picture can be combined electronically with people from others. Heads of state could be shown greeting each other at an airport even though one, or both, were never really there." Computers could easily concoct a tale of a presidential candidate smiling and chatting with men wearing Klan robes or Dan Quayle on a shadowy street corner whispering to a prostitute.

Ease of Alteration

Videotape editing was always done numerically by machine, not by hand. Artistic control was lost. Now, after a few hours' tutoring with a computer, even a novice can edit videotape visually to professional standards.

The footage is run through a videotape recorder that's connected to a computer. The computer digitizes each frame — turns it into electronic representations of digits — and stores it in the computer's memory. Images can be called up on the computer's video screen frame by frame or in a series of several at a time, like a strip of film. The "composer," as the computer jockey is called, draws and points with a pencil-like wand on an electronically-sensitive slate to tell the computer what to do. Images can be shrunk, zoomed, moved or manipulated almost without limit. If the effect isn't quite right, the composer simply tells the computer to undo it and tries again.

With today's equipment, actors can be added to scenes they never inhabited, or deleted from scenes in which they appeared; a parking lot can be transformed into a meadow, or a river can become a freeway. The changes are virtually seamless, quite possibly undetectable even by the engineers who create the effects.

By putting image-making decisions into the hands of editing technicians, "these machines raise legal and ethical questions that range from the nature of copyright laws to the breadth of the First Amendment," an engineer commented.

Retouching Reality

As the *National Geographic* cover demonstrates, newspapers and magazines have been wrestling, not always successfully, with these questions for nearly two decades since digital manipulation of still photographs was pioneered in the early 1970s. Commerce was quick to make use of the technology. The colors and appearance of products and models in photos are now routinely tweaked through digital reprocessing to suit the whims of their purveyors. "Without announcement, advertising has become completely illusory," notes Stewart Brand, author of *The Media Lab: Inventing the Future at MIT* and former publisher of *The Whole Earth Catalog*. "There was never a point—a scandal or something—that let people catch on that catalogs and ads are often very far removed from representation of reality in photographic images."

The only real safeguard preventing similar manipulation in news images is the degree of integrity the technology's users bring to it, Mayer thinks. "People in the industry have been particularly sensisitve in this area. The downside of abusing this kind of public trust is so great that most people aren't willing to risk it. The use of this equipment is built on a tacit ethical understanding that doesn't allow users to go too far too fast."

For the moment, news producers would do well to learn from *National Geographic's* mistake: Entertainment is one thing, but people like their reality straight. They won't tolerate reality-fiddling from those they trust for accurate information about reality. ABC News learned that the hard way when for its evening report it simulated alleged spy Felix Bloch handing his attaché case to a Soviet agent.

Viewers in search of honest pictures are squeezed between two unhappy truths: They can't tell a falsified image simply by looking at it, and they can't trust news organizations to tell them up front when an image has been tinkered with.

The dangers are obvious.

"We see everything, but know almost nothing."

Susan Stamberg, National Public Radio

The major question about the technology's implications is a basic one: How much computerized fiddling are we willing to accept, and from whom? "Don't trust a photograph if anything is riding on it," says Loren Carpenter, a senior scientist at Pixar, a San Francisco-based computer graphics company, and formerly a specialist in synthetic photography at Lucasfilm, the California movie studio that produced the *Star Wars* trilogy and other special effects films. Brand agrees that this is in "the thick of how we'll think about communication and 'truth' and editorial responsibility—the broadcast fabric of civilization."

Gradually, Mayer thinks, viewers will become more sophisticated in judging and evaluating video fare. "People establish a visual language and the rules for understanding that language," he says.

"With this new technology, there might be ambiguity in some cases. But sophistication ratchets with time. As rules change and evolve, they're absorbed throughout society very quickly. Not as quickly as technology advances, though. By the new century, computers will be able to create scenes out of digits, people them with animated stills of actors and synthesize voices to go with them to create personal movies.

"We don't know what all these changes are going to mean to the industry or to its audience," Zeltzer says. "But we're going to find out sooner than any of us are really prepared to."

ON THE AIR
I DON'T KNOW WHY ALL THE FUSS ABOUT SIMULATED NEWS...
... FAR AS I CAN TELL IT'S ALL SIMULATED.
RATINGS
DANZIGER
© 1989 CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Bennett Daviss is a freelance writer living in New England. Excerpted and reprinted with the permission of Television and Families.

MAKING THE NEWS PAY

Is the news business selling its soul for profits?

By Jeff Greenfield

Once upon a time television news made news because of what it reported. Today it is the business of TV news that is making news. With all three networks presiding over major news division cutbacks, old-timers worry about the economic focus of today's newsgathering. It's news when NBC's Roger Mudd resigns to protest the cancellation of *1986*. It's a story when key ABC producer Av Westin is suspended after circulating a memo asking how network news operations became "the burden they now seem to represent in the new era of bottom-line management."

"News has to face a new reality," an anonymous "management source" at CBS said bluntly. "News has to operate on lower budget numbers or make more money."

At the same time, the ever more predictable local television news operations are showing more and more signs of muscle-flexing. And, thanks to the latest technological explosions, local news broadcasts today are increasing their reach to national and worldwide coverage — so much so that some present and former network news officials are openly wondering whether network news as we now know it is dying.

"We have a window of about two years at most," said the same Av Westin. "If we keep doing the same thing, we'll be sitting ducks (to local news competition). We have to demonstrate somehow that what we do is important."

These disparate events are linked to one central question: Is television news supposed to make a profit? Is there a contradiction between broadcast journalism's obligation to serve "the public interest, convenience and necessity," and the insistence of the new network bosses that news operations at least pay their own way? Or, have network journalists simply inhabited a Cloud Cuckoo-Land in recent years, expanding their operations (and the cost of those operations) with insufficient regard for money?

Even more important, what does it mean to the understanding of citizens of a global power if the centralized information sources of TV networks are superseded by dozens of local outlets, each putting a local "spin" on a story on the Philippines or the Mideast? How might the building of a national consensus be affected by this fragmentation?

"The main purpose of television news is to sell television news."

Howard Rosenberg, *Los Angeles Times* television critic

Second Thoughts

The thought that news should "make a profit" was unthinkable to journalists and executives for decades. Controversial radio news personalities such as William Shirer suffered drastic reduction in income when they lost sponsors. And as TV supplanted radio as the leading broadcast medium in the 1950s, and prime time became an increasingly valuable commodity, news programs such as Murrow's *See It Now* began to disappear from the more valuable time slots.

The principal value of news to a network was indirect, and calculated on a long-term economic basis. News, more than any other form of programming, was what gave the TV networks a claim beyond "mere" profitability. In the words of James Magid, a media analyst with L.F. Rothschild, Unterberg, and Towbin, news "gave (the networks) the corporate mountaintop, something no auto company, no oil company had. It was a shield over their other activities."

Television, after all, is a business regulated by the federal government (unlike newspapers); the licenses of stations owned and operated by the networks could theoretically be taken away if the FCC determined that the licensee was not serving the public interest.

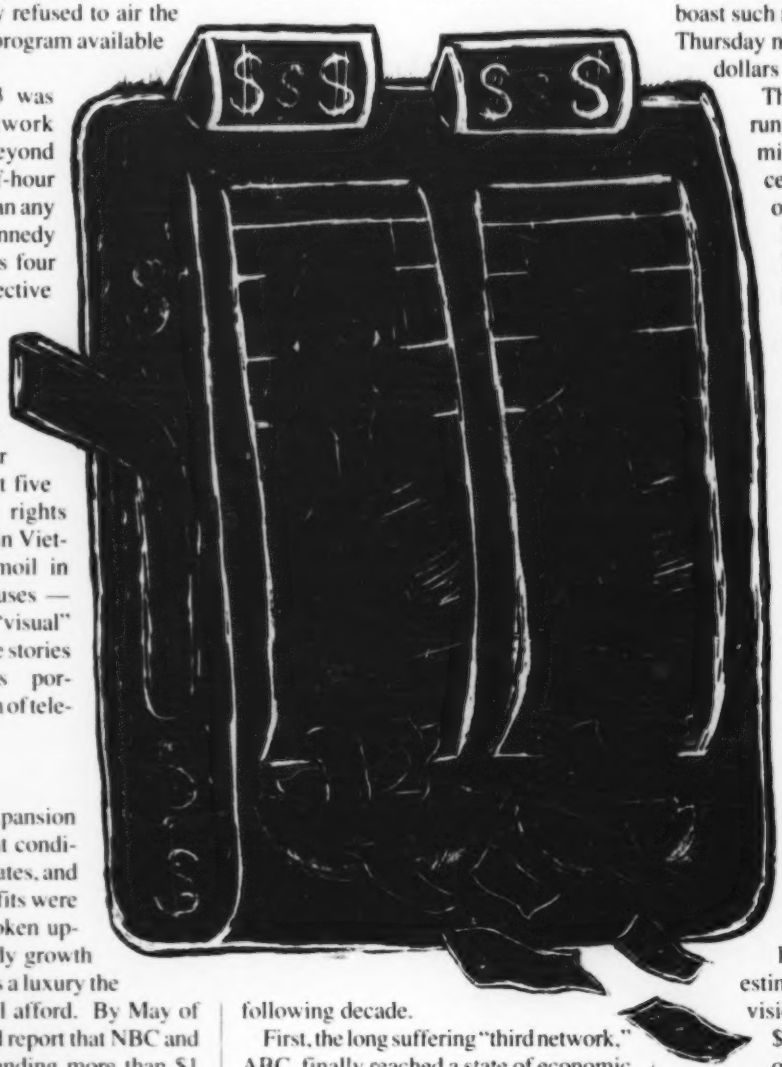
To protect the huge value of their station licenses, networks were more than willing to promote the news as a "loss leader," and devote money and time to it.

Not valuable prime time, of course. The staple evening news program that most viewers associate with the term "network news" is broadcast in "local station" time, in the hours between daytime and prime time when local stations traditionally provide their own program material instead of taking a network feed.

But during the TV industry's first two decades, few local affiliates resisted carrying the network evening news. The FCC required that local stations devote a reasonable portion of their broadcast time to non-entertainment programming, and specified not less than 10 percent be di-

vided between news and other public affairs programming. Thus, when CBS and NBC increased their evening newscasts from 15 to 30 minutes in the fall of 1963, local stations accepted the loss of 15 minutes from their own time because — in the words of political scientist Edward J. Epstein — "They knew how the commission felt about national news, and it wouldn't help matters at license renewal time if they refused to air the only national news program available to them."

The fall of 1963 was significant to network news operations beyond the increase to half-hour newscasts. More than any other event, the Kennedy assassination and its four days of TV-led collective mourning validated TV news as the single most important source of information for Americans. And other events over the next five years — the civil rights revolution, the war in Vietnam, domestic turmoil in cities and on campuses — seemed particularly "visual" in nature. They were stories well-suited to news portrayal by the medium of television.



Upward Spiral

When economic expansion seemed a permanent condition of the United States, and overall network profits were on a virtually unbroken upward path, the steady growth of news budgets was a luxury the networks could well afford. By May of 1969, *Fortune* could report that NBC and CBS were each spending more than $1 million a week on news programming. The three networks were altogether spending an estimated $140 million annually. The magazine also reported that the evening news shows had become highly profitable; for example, costs of NBC's top-rated *Huntley-Brinkley Report* were said to be $7.2 million that year while revenues reached $34 million.

Overall, however, network news operations at the end of the 1960s were still "loss leaders." According to an analysis prepared for *TV Guide* in 1980, the three network news divisions had combined losses of about $20 million a year in 1970.

Although from the vantage point of the late 1980s the 1970s were golden years of network news profits, some of the main sources of that profitability would become sources of network woes in the following decade.

First, the long suffering "third network," ABC, finally reached a state of economic health in the mid-1970s. It began pumping the newfound profits from its prime-time schedule into the anemic news division. Thanks to network raids on NBC and CBS affiliates, ABC News became a roughly equal competitor of its big brothers. Its nightly news program began to show a profit. And according to a *TV Guide* article on August 23, 1980, the three networks in 1979 made a combined profit on their nightly news shows of about $760 million a year.

Second, CBS found a gold mine in its weekly news program *60 Minutes*, which became the single most profitable program in broadcasting history at far less cost to the network than entertainment programming. Estimates of *60 Minutes*' profitability ran as high as $75 million a year. And while ABC's *20/20* could not boast such ratings, its relative success on Thursday nights also brought millions of dollars of profits into ABC's coffers.

Third, one-minute *News Updates* run between prime-time programming proved enormously successful. Confidential documents obtained by *Variety* in May of 1980, for example, showed that NBC made $23,000 in profit per 30-second update.

This picture of profitability is by no means one-dimensional; indeed, it is possible that, depending on bookkeeping techniques, overall network news operations still showed a loss. One network corporate executive recently stated that extra election year costs can wipe out news division profits for the three previous years. An extended stint of "crisis reporting," such as the 1980 Iran hostage story or the Challenger tragedy, routinely costs a news division millions of dollars that can never be recouped.

By the end of the 1970s, it was clear that network news had become a major factor in overall network budgeting, both in costs and revenues. By 1980, according to industry estimates, each network news division was spending more than $100 million annually. And over the next few years (according to CBS figures widely publicized in the press), network news costs took another exponential leap forward. During the same period, overall network profits began to drop. Thus, the framework for the current pinch was established.

The competition developed partly within network news itself. The addition of ABC as a third player in what had been a two-and-a-half network business inevi-

tably drove up prices for talent across the board, not just for luminaries such as Barbara Walters, hired by ABC in 1976 at the then unheard-of salary of $1 million. The vigorous pursuit of Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw by ABC News forced CBS and NBC to sign these highly valuable anchors at astronomical prices.

"Traditional journalism doesn't win ratings; effective television wins ratings."

Peter J. Boyer, *Who Killed CBS?*

ABC News also helped drive up costs at the other two networks by investing in expensive new equipment, especially computer-generated graphics machines. During the same time period, outside competition from VCRs, cable and independent television stations had all cut into the hegemony of the three networks. The prime-time network share of the total viewing audience dipped from 90 percent to below 77 percent between 1978 and 1983, and was headed further south. By the mid-1980s, a general "softening" in the national advertising market had caused the unthinkable: Two of the three TV networks were actually losing money.

Finally, the regulatory atmosphere of the 1980s had resulted in another unthinkable event: the transfer of ownership of all three of the networks within a little more than a year.

The *laissez faire* philosophy of FCC chairman Mark Fowler and his view of TV as a "toaster with pictures" ended up revolutionizing the ownership structure of the three networks and most large station groups. What all three networks now had in common was a greatly increased debt-to-equity ratio, and new owners with no link to the old tradition that tended to shield network news from the accountants and cost managers. These owners began asking questions about a division that cost more money than it generated, and that was, moreover, under the direct control of the network — unlike the prime-time entertainment product that federal rules still forced them to purchase mainly from outside suppliers.

The Rise of Local News

Twenty years ago, there was little doubt why local stations put on news. "News is the price of the license," one executive said. By and large, little local air time was devoted to it, and little money as well. In New York in 1966, the media capital of the United States, the CBS and NBC-owned stations aired an hour of local news, and ABC a half hour. But around the country 10- and 15-minute early evening news broadcasts were the rule. Few local stations could afford the investment required to "do the news" right. Film equipment was expensive and time-consuming, and live technology was difficult; a story that broke after noon could be covered only by rushing film back to the studio or by microwave trucks.

Local TV stations first discovered that news could make big money in the latter part of the 1960s. And one of the principal spurs to this discovery was the astonishing growth in local TV advertising in this critical period. Over the seven years from 1965 to 1972, while the total network advertising marketplace grew a respectable 50 percent, the local TV advertising marketplace grew 150 percent. This huge availability of local advertising dollars was a gold mine waiting to be explored.

Technology in the form of a series of technological breakthroughs — from videotapes to computer graphics — made stories easier and cheaper to produce. Local news production was a logical alternative. The birth of the *Eyewitness News* format — or "happy talk" to its detractors — at New York's WABC in 1965 suggested that the local news programs were increasingly abandoning the idea of news for whatever would make an appealing "show" and increase local station identity and credits.

The thought that news should make a profit was unthinkable for decades.

When major-market station managers saw that an increase of a single rating point could increase revenues by $1 to $4 million annually, their first response, as a rule, was to produce the news programs like entertainment.

The recommendation of emerging news "consultants" seemed to push for more and shorter news stories and for visually compelling material (the fire in the lumberyard, not the detailed examination of the school budget). The rush toward the exploitative, sensational stories in the November, February and May "sweeps" periods — "Your Sexual Fantasies," "X-rated Cassettes," "Kiddie Porn" and the like — became pronounced. As a 1984 *TV Guide* article explained, "Television reporters frequently complain that once they begin researching a story, they discover information contradicting what they had expected to fund. But because advertisements have already been placed and viewers expect to see the story that was advertised, compromises must be made."

As the "compromises" grew, the image of local news declined precipitously. By the 1980s, local news had become a huge source of profits. What are the dimensions of this profitability?

- A 1977 *Wall Street Journal* article reported that "a local news show could produce 60 percent of a local station's profits."
- A *Watch* magazine article in March 1980 asserted, "It is now common practice for many affiliated stations to allocate $3 to $6 million annually for their newscasts, and then reap profits of 50 to 75 percent. Many general managers report at least half of their station's profit comes to them via the newsrooms"
- A 1981 *Madison Avenue* magazine article estimated the annual news profits at each of the New York network-owned stations at $25 to $30 million.
- A survey by the Radio and TV News Directors Association in 1983 stated that some 85 percent of all stations (including hard-pressed independent and UHF stations) reported that local news either made money or earned its keep.

By contrast, network news operations — having grown bigger and much more expensive — find themselves being told

to play by new financial rules: Start paying a bigger share of your costs, or you will be reduced in size until you do so.

With these kinds of profits and the availability of satellite technology, local stations covering a breaking news story could send it live from the field to any other station on the continent, usually hours before a network crew arrived on the scene. In addition, the growth of syndicated newsfeeds means that local stations no longer need to rely on the networks' pictures of national or world events.

How these local news capacities could ultimately affect network news hegemony was first demonstrated in January 1986 by KSTP, the Minneapolis affiliate owned by Conus satellite network founder Stan Hubbard. Instead of carrying ABC News coverage of President Reagan's State of the Union message, the local station covered the event on its own, with local anchors, a reporter from the station's Washington, D.C. bureau, and Minnesota politicians and journalists serving as analysts. Several local stations did the same for the State of the Union message in 1987.

If a local station can provide this type of coverage one night a year, why not 365 nights a year? If a local stations drops the network newscast, fills the extra half hours with its own national and world coverage, and keeps the same ratings, it pockets all the revenue for that time slot instead of settling for a network compensation payment — a difference worth millions of dollars annually.

This scenario has led some observers, no doubt simplistically, to label network news as a "dinosaur." Affiliates that have spent decades carrying network news programs (and promotional advertising for them) will not cancel the flagship evening news program without prayerful consideration. Already, however, the networks are on notice that they cannot continue to provide the same kind of evening newscast they have in the past.

The networks have begun to retool their flagship news programs, and the evolution, while gradual, is clear: longer stories, more multi-part series, and the use of two-way interviews between the anchors and correspondents.

One network is currently experimenting with a new model for a more radically revised evening news program: a headline story, a quick recap of other stories, and then an in-depth look at the major story, including analytical reports and interviews.

Nightline-style coverage at 7 p.m. is just one possible network response to the muscle of local news. Another would be to surrender, to acknowledge that network news is an anachronism. If cost pressures push the networks to this view, it is conceivable that the nightly newscasts will be reduced to an anchor and a few "star" correspondents packaging the tape and interviews gathered by lower-paid, off-air reporters, as in a *CBS Evening News* piece about the trial of Czechoslovakian cultural dissidents in March 1986. There was no on-scene CBS News correspondent. Instead, Dan Rather narrated the story with pooled footage of the Czech courtroom.

"The First Amendment was not passed to guarantee greater and greater profits for (media) owners."

Katherine Fanning, former editor
Christian Science Monitor

No Branch Office

Scaled-back coverage of this sort may be a lot cheaper than conventional network news reporting, but there are limits to its economic effectiveness. As former CBS News president Richard Salant has said, a network news bureau isn't a branch office, but a fire station. It has to be there to respond when its region suddenly hits the news. The networks may save themselves the cost of managing a bureau, but if their intention is to convince local stations of their necessity as news organizations, they may be proving penny-wise and pound-foolish. Why should a local station listen to network claims that they are uniquely qualified "to bring you the world," if the networks in fact become more like a syndicated newsfeed or electronic wire service?

A third possible route for network news is to take a page from the local book and "soften" newscasts. This has been the early-morning trend in the last decade at all three networks. More analytical, less frenetic evening newscasts may ultimately be cheaper to produce. And they would provide what has been sorely lacking until now — an attempt not simply to cover the world, but to explain it.

In a time of softening advertising revenues, and a change in network power that appears permanent, it is silly to pretend that broadcast news is somehow exempt from the laws of economics. In 1986, according to one network veteran (that is, a high-ranking executive who lost his job) CBS News made a profit of $9 million on a budget of $270 million; but $50 million of that profit came directly from *60 Minutes*. Since the program runs in prime time, and since there is no guarantee that it will produce similar numbers year after year, CBS takes the in-house view that its news division loses $40 million a year.

What is not silly — indeed, what is critically important — is for the corporate owners of networks to remember what sort of enterprise they have acquired. To treat the news as a commodity that can be measured in output, is ultimately self-destructive. What has brought viewers to network news in the past is the sense that they were getting a look at the world impossible to get elsewhere. In the 1990s, viewers may turn to the networks out of a sense that they are getting an explanation, not just a look, at that world. Developing an explanation often takes time: the time it takes a Charles Kuralt to find an unforgettable character on the road; the time it takes an NBC investigative news team to unearth corruption; the time it takes a Ted Koppel and a *Nightline* staff to travel to South Africa. A network news operation that deprives its viewers of that kind of experience will, in the long run, lose both the trust and the loyalty of its viewers. It is hard to imagine a more costly loss for the network: to its long-term profits or its soul.

Jeff Greenfield is a correspondent with ABC-TV Nightline *and a syndicated columnist. This article originally appeared in the inaugural issue (Spring 1987) of the* Gannett Center Journal. *Sam Churchman is a freelance artist who lives and works in Los Angeles.*

THE NEWS AT ANY COST:

How far should a journalist go to get a story?

Editor's note: *In 1985, Tom Goldstein published* The News At Any Cost: How Journalists Compromise Their Ethics to Shape the News. *The book was a bombshell, laying bare a host of deceptive practices routinely used by reporters to obtain information. Moreover, Goldstein, a former reporter for the* Wall Street Journal, *the* New York Times, Newsday *and the Associated Press, admitted that he, too, had committed many of the offenses for which he harshly criticized his colleagues.*

Goldstein, who also served as press secretary to former New York Mayor Ed Koch, remains highly critical of the news media. Now dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Goldstein spoke with Media&Values' *Ira Rifkin about the seedier side of news reporting. Following are edited excerpts from their conversation.*

M&V: *What are some of the deceptive practices used by journalists that you detail in your book?*

Goldstein: Faking identities, secretly taping conversations, manipulating sources so they will divulge information, accepting gifts and otherwise becoming too cozy with sources, setting up ambush interviews, plagiarism and outright fabrication of details and information. When I was a legal reporter for the *New York Times*, I was asked to deliver a speech to attorneys for which I would be paid $1,500. When I asked an editor if it was permissible, he expressed jealousy but no reservations.

M&V: *Have your views changed at all since the book was published?*

Goldstein: I'm still quite critical, but I'm slightly more understanding of reporters' failings and more critical of editors and publishers for setting a bad example from the top. When I was a young reporter no one made a point of telling me about ethical standards. A lot of newspapers and TV and radio stations have fairly good ethical guidelines, at least on paper. But they do a miserable job — and there is some irony in this — of communicating these guidelines. In many cases, it's just paying lip service. If the upper levels would do a better job of letting those who work for them know what is the expected standard, we would all be better off.

M&V: *How widespread are these abuses?*

Goldstein: It's almost impossible to calculate because we only learn about them after the fact, after someone has been identified as having committed an abuse. Take the Janet Cooke situation (she is the ex-*Washington Post* reporter who won a Pulitzer Prize for a story about an eight-year-old drug addict who, in fact, did not exist). Had she not won the prize and been subject to more scrutiny, her deception might have gone undetected.

My suspicion is that there is a relatively large amount of journalistic abuse. It just doesn't come to the surface.

M&V: *What's the worst abuse?*

Goldstein: Deception. I'd like to see journalists be required to give people a Miranda warning. "I'm a journalist and what you say may be used against you."

M&V: *Is any attention devoted to ethics in news room situations?*

Goldstein: I've been in enough news rooms to say not enough attention is paid to the subject. There's more of an awareness than there used to be, but there's still little time given over to reflection. Few journalists stop long enough to ask themselves: Why are we doing this? What are the consequences? Why are we running this piece? Who will it hurt, and do we have to run something just because we know about it?

M&V: *What's the root of the problem?*

Public service — the reason newspapers and broadcasters have been granted constitutional protection in the first place — requires sacrifice, and a slavish preoccupation with profits makes sacrifice unfashionable.

Goldstein: I think there are lots of causes: inadequate education, the marketplace playing more of a role than it should, the extreme pressure that journalists are subjected to, their thinking that they know more than they do. Mistakes are made and ethics are trampled on and often journalists are too thin-skinned to admit it.

M&V: *How much of the problem can be attributed to making concern for the bottom line primary?*

Goldstein: It's a very strong factor. Basically, I believe that economic competition is salutary, but it has a major downside when it leads those who should do better to lower their standards. For example, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* might not be the first to touch a questionable story, but they often will use it after it's appeared in a tabloid. And if they do cover a story, that tends to legitimize it.

M&V: *Speaking of the* Times *and the* Journal, *it seems to me that newspapers of that caliber are now printing a lot of things they would not have published just a few years ago.*

Goldstein: I've been troubled the last couple of years by the extraordinary change in opinion over what's reportable and what's not. The Gary Hart situation really exemplifies this. The old rule used to be that private facts were overlooked unless they affected public activity. Now the changed notion is that private facts affect character, somehow. That's just too slippery.

M&V: *I'm beginning to wonder whether you believe journalists have any redeeming value?*

Goldstein: Of course I do. Remember the *New Yorker* article by Janet Malcolm in which she said that what journalists do is "morally indefensible"? I think that's an insane generalization. There are some journalists whose techniques are indefensible. But most journalists do not begin to approach that. And while it's not any kind of an excuse, often when journalists cross over the ethical line it's because they genuinely believe that doing so will serve the greater truth.

M&V: *How did your colleagues take your criticism of them?*

Goldstein: Generally, pretty well. I thought I was pretty tough on the *New York Times*, for example, but they hired me back. Now, that doesn't jive with my position that journalists are too thin-skinned, but you also can't expect journalists to be consistent. That's not their strong suit.

M&V: *Working for Mayor Koch put you on the other side of the fence. What was your opinion of the news media from that perspective?*

Goldstein: They weren't tough enough. Maybe it was because I was press secretary during Koch's (first years as mayor), but I felt they let him get away with too much. Reporters were willing to passively accept information rather than going out and pursuing stories.

M&V: *Any suggestions for improving the news media?*

Goldstein: I think quotes should be read back to sources. It takes more time and it gives sources the opportunity to back away from statements, but the integrity it would lend to the final story would make it worthwhile. I'm pretty much an absolutist. It's okay to miss some stories. The press also needs to explain itself more to the average person. Journalists should tell people why they do what they do and how they do it. I also think reporters should be able to speak with more authority. I'm not afraid of saying "I" as opposed to going to quote machines so they can say it for you. Saying "I" also puts things out front. Reporters have feelings and viewpoints. It's time to abandon the myth of objectivity.

M&V: *Any advice for the news media consumer?*

Goldstein: Get your information from more than one source.

Re-Action

How to Know What's Going On

Although it is important to develop a critically questioning eye and ear, moving beyond mainstream media to a wide variety of alternative sources of information is an even better way to be better informed about both domestic and world events. Newsletters from religious and humanitarian organizations such as Church World Service or Amnesty International are a good place to start, as are public radio news shows such as those on National Public Radio or the Pacifica radio stations.

Magazines and alternative newspapers can also provide additional perspectives. Spend an hour at a newsstand or bookstore (or check the periodical room of your local library) and look through such periodicals as the *National Catholic Reporter, Tikkun, The Nation, In These Times, South, The Economist, New Perspectives Quarterly.*

Compare notes with friends and perhaps share the cost of a subscription. Or each one subscribe to a different journal and exchange. The bottom line is to read, watch and listen critically to a wide range of points of view.

REFLECTION/ACTION

Tools to build media awareness for groups, classes, families

YOUTH

Active Roles Spark Young Newshounds

By William J. Cirone

Regardless of media content — and some content, of course, is quite high caliber — media viewing is always a passive activity. As an educator, I worry that the passive nature of heavy media viewing has a chilling effect on young people's desire to participate in a wide range of activities. This does not bode well for a democratic process that relies on active participation.

How, then, do we get young people interested in citizenship? How do we get them interested in the news they need to become informed voters?

Entrepreneurs such as Chris Whittle of Whittle Communications have tried to cash in on the student news gap. Whittle's *Channel One* supplies high schools with expensive satellite and video equipment to pick up a 10-minute news program plus two minutes of advertising, which all students must watch. Critics in many states have successfully fought this intrusion of commercialism into our classrooms.

In a purer variation of this model, Turner Educational Services offers *CNN Newsroom*, a daily, 15-minute commercial-free news program and an accompanying classroom guide at no charge to schools equipped with cable and electronic text services. More comprehensive educational materials are available by subscription.

However effective, these programs cast young people as passive viewers and fail to get them involved with news. Yet, as a Chinese proverb states: "Tell me, and I remember. Involve me and I understand."

During the last U.S. presidential election, my office joined forces with other agencies to stage "mock elections" in all 10 high schools in the county. We used real voting booths and ballots. This "dress rehearsal" for voting received broad-based, enthusiastic praise.

There are other ways to involve students in the news. Children's Express is a national network of young journalists. Students write the stories and students edit the results. Newspapers around the United States run the columns. The pieces are hard-hitting and endlessly interesting. Clearly, the students who take part will be interested in news long after they part company with Children's Express.

There are no easy answers about the best ways to transmit to our youth the values our society cherishes. If interest in citizenship is our value, then we must expose students to high caliber news programs, and, somewhere along the way, also work to involve them in the news process. Only then will they understand the active role they must take in setting society's goals and solving its problems.

William J. Cirone is superintendent of schools for Santa Barbara County, California, and a board member of the Center for Media and Values.

WOMEN

Can a Woman Deliver The News?

By Anne M. Cooper Chen

A longstanding argument holds that women's voices are not authoritative on-air personalities. Following this tradition, U.S. network anchors have almost always been men, despite the star status of Barbara Walters and the more recent on-air success of women such as Diane Sawyer and Connie Chung.

Until recently there was little data on the situation in other countries. But as the research coordinator for a late '80s study of women's participation in five countries' newscasts, I had the opportunity to observe that barriers against women are falling in many countries. At the same time, it was obvious that the style and organization of newscasts had a major impact on women's presence and visibility on national news shows.

In our study on *Television's Invisible Women: A Five-Nation Study of Anchors, Reporters and Correspondents*, we analyzed a week of newscasts from three developing countries — Colombia, Sri Lanka and Jamaica — and two industrial powers, Japan and the United States. In all five, women's appearance as anchors seemed to be determined largely by each country's system of anchor selection and rotation.

Both Jamaica and Sri Lanka use a stable of rotating anchors; in Jamaica, for example, audiences saw five different faces in four days of the study. Five out of eight Jamaican anchors during the survey week were women. Japan used a male/female team and Colombia featured such a team on one day. Both Sri Lanka and the United States use a single anchor. However, a woman in Sri Lanka's rotating crew of journalists anchored the news once during the week surveyed. Only the United States uses a single, never-changing male anchor.

A look at women's role as reporters, however, demonstrated that common assumptions and stereotypes crossed national borders. In all five countries, business and the economy, the most prevalent types of news, were covered by both men and women. But women almost never covered disasters, accidents and crime. In all five countries, also, governmental

The issue of values in today's media is not having all the answers but asking the right questions.

— ***Media&Values*** **Editorial Philosophy**

stories were covered by men and science/health stories were covered by women.

The ban against women as foreign correspondents, a frequent route to career advancement, was also nearly universal in the three countries that sent journalists abroad. The discrimination may be the result of paternalistic feelings that foreign reporting is too dangerous or strenuous for women, or perhaps that women could not get stories effectively because of perceived machismo, would be too conspicuous to move freely or would face legal barriers in some countries.

It's clear that gatekeepers still associate certain stories with women. Surprisingly, Colombia, Jamaica and Sri Lanka all had a strong female presence in domestic reporting, with stories covering a wide range of topics.

What would happen if women's news roles expanded? Journalism professor Catherine Covert has speculated that female values of "concord, harmony, affiliation and community" might make women less drawn to writing the news "as a series of conflicts."

Unfortunately, we'll never know until more women get on the air.

Anne M. Cooper Chen is an associate professor in the E. W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University.

CHILDREN

Parents Can Help Defuse Bad News

By Judith M. Myers-Walls

News is now entertainment. TV news is no longer just "talking heads." From videos of the latest disaster to photos of missing children, even newspapers carry graphic headlines and photos. Most adults want children to be well-informed and interested in current events, but what happens to children who watch re-enactments of crimes, see closeups of murder victims, or experience the play-by-play excavation of trapped earthquake victims?

Adults have learned to distance themselves from the tragedies being enacted in their living rooms. But children have no such defenses. Unlike any previous generation, today's parents need to confront the fears, questions and confusion today's graphic news coverage may raise in children. What can adults do?

Children need help to understand the techniques and special effects used in the news, just as they need explanations of the mechanics of movies and entertainment television. Consumer education should include the consuming of information.

When violence, war and disasters hit the news, encourage children to talk about their fears and concerns, and give them ideas of action that they can take to feel in control. This could include a discussion of personal safety; tornado, fire, or earthquake precautions; and personal action to try to reduce the probability of war. Children need help to realize that fears raised by crime and disaster reports are exaggerated. Such a debriefing requires special attention during or immediately following newscasts. Avoid the temptation to totally turn off the kids while you watch.

Finally, try to choose news programs or newspapers and magazines with less sensational approaches. Banish irresponsible informants. And if the news is simply too intense for the young children in your home, consider scheduling special activities for the children that will keep them occupied while you watch, or tape the news and watch it later.

Judith A. Myers-Walls is associate professor of child development at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana.

MINORITIES

Seattle Paper Fights Newsroom Racism

By Sharon Maeda

It all began with an isolated incident — a Ku Klux Klan newspaper left on the desk of an African-American reporter. That occurrence, coupled with a performance-based pay system in which people of color tended to be rated lower than their counterparts, prompted concern about racial issues at the *Seattle Times*.

In 1988, under the leadership of managing editor Alex MacLeod, a committee on minority concerns was created. It conducted an assessment of news story and photo content as well as employee attitudes. "Although we had increased the minorities on our news staff from four percent to 15 percent in eight years, we were not doing the best job of coverage," MacLeod said. "Our awareness of this situation is due to our success." MacLeod has personally recruited people of color from journalism schools.

The committee and a consultant, Dr. Marilyn Gist, then developed race awareness workshops. All 350 news employees were given permission to attend small group workshops during their shifts. The workshops were well received and provided an opportunity for people to share their feelings and ideas.

"Even the complaints have helped to raise issues and bring openness," said Jerry Large, assistant city editor. "But some wounds were opened and now we have to bring people together and close the wounds." The *Times* recently featured Large's three-page article on his travels as an African-American through East and West Africa.

Seattle has long been considered a model

"When you mix fiction and news, you diminish the distinction between truth and fiction, and you wear down the audience's own discriminating power to judge."

Bill Moyers

of race relations. It was the first major city to voluntarily desegregate its schools, and it now has its first African-American mayor, Nora Rice.

But, more to the point, the *Seattle Times* is owned by a local family and has a managing editor genuinely committed to these issues in Alex MacLeod.

As we go to press, a new committee is meeting, charged with finding ways to institutionalize the results of the workshops. Whatever those next steps, the *Seattle Times* is at the cutting edge of seriously addressing institutionalized racism in the newsroom. It would be something of a "new national information order" if other dailies and radio/TV news organizations were to follow suit.

Sharon Maeda is president of Spectra Communications, Inc., a management and media consulting firm in Seattle.

PASTORING

Study Debunks Myths About Religion Beat

By Stewart Hoover

Newspaper coverage of religion has long been one of the backwaters of American journalism. The religion beat has generally held lower status (where it exists at all) than other positions at newspapers, and stories on religion (if they appear) either get short shrift or are relegated to the Saturday "church page."

Several perceptions seem to underlie this approach to religion news. First, many journalists are convinced that we are in a period of secularization, with fewer and fewer people either actively religious or interested in religion. This perception is reinforced by declines in church membership over the past 25 years, and a seeming decline in the moral authority of the once-dominant "establishment" churches of America.

Journalists also tend to believe that newspaper readers are primarily interested in religion as a *local* or *parochial* story. They are convinced that readers are interested in news about their own local church and its bake sales, but in little else. A third, related misperception is that religious news consciousness is a regional phenomenon, with the most concentrated interest in rural areas and the traditional "Bible Belt" of the South and Southwest. If this were true, it would follow that newspapers in those areas, and particularly newspapers in smaller communities, would be the ones doing the best job of covering religion.

I recently served as principal investigator of a major study of religion reporting and readership. Researchers from Temple University working in cooperation with the Religious News Service with funding by Lilly Endowment conducted national surveys, in-depth studies in congregations and interviews with religion journalists and their supervisors at newspapers around the country.

As research progressed, we found that many of the preconceptions were myths. We also discovered that the impact of news about religion was of even more profound importance to readers than we had thought.

Newspaper readers are far more likely to be interested in religion and in religion news than is often suspected. The vast majority of readers consider religion to be important in their lives, and two-thirds of them feel that it is important for newspapers they read to cover religion.

Readers did not consider news about religion the most important subject newspapers covered. But they did rank it in the middle of a comparison of importance — even above sports! Survey data also showed that readers look to newspapers to cover religion in general, not just news of their own church or faith group. They want newspapers to inform them about such things as world religions, the role of religion in politics and foreign affairs, and the positions of major faith groups on social and ethical issues.

Readers and journalists agreed that the religion beat is changing, however. While most readers expressed dissatisfaction with religion coverage, there is a general perception that religion finds its way onto the front page more and more frequently. Many of these stories demand coverage on their own merits, but there may be a new mood of openness and interest in religion news growing as newspapers come to understand it as a diverse, multifaceted and rich beat.

For more information about RNS/Lilly Endowment Study of Religion Reporting and Readership, write Stewart Hoover at Annenberg Hall (011-00), Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 19122.

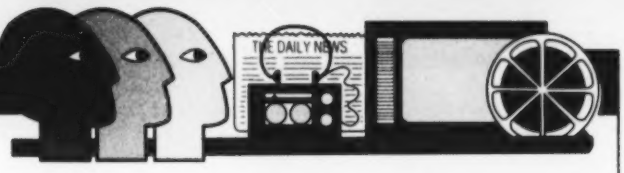
Stewart Hoover is an associate professor of the Temple University School of Communications and Theater. He is also a member of the board of directors of the Center for Media and Values.

Re-Action

Make Your Own News

Create your own workshop or study seminar on values in the news today. Use our special leader's guide/workshop kit to organize a program around the articles and ideas contained in this issue. Kit contains eight-page guide and reproducible black-line masters plus tips and techniques for creating a successful event for youth or adults.

See page 1 for price and how to order.



Beyond the Myth of Objectivity

By Jay Davis

Objectivity, n. (Apparently,) The practice of presenting both sides of an issue.

Spend a week watching any of the network news reports and you are likely to conclude that all issues have only two sides and that middle-aged, white males have the only insight on them. From Sunday afternoon interview programs to ABC's *Nightline*, satisfying the U.S. media's standards of "objectivity" seems to require bringing opposing personalities together to debate issues of foreign and domestic policy. The ensuing dialogue, usually between Democrats and Republicans or some equivalent, suggests that all sides of the issue are covered.

"It is fitting that U.S. newspapers are printed in black and white. It is quite symbolic of the views they present."

Rose Brown, journalism student

This dualism is one way media interpret news in North America. It seems clear, however, that "presenting both sides" tends to undermine creative discussion of the many shades of belief that actually represent opinion on complex issues.

If all issues are presented in black-and-white, yes-and-no terms, if one is either pro-life or pro-choice, pro-intervention or anti-intervention, what happens to discussion of cases that fail to fit the neatly established dichotomy?

Another traditional definition of objectivity focuses on the idea of impartiality. In this view, objectivity means keeping one's own beliefs, opinions or feelings separate from the story. This definition is more textbook than honest, however. Most journalists would agree that true impartiality is impossible. Even the most evenhanded reporter is subject to personal bias.

Objectivity is stressed and stretched today by the growth of new media and the shrinkage of mass media markets. Its surviving forms carry the weight of tradition. The unwary viewer can be left with the impression that media dualism represents all the sides there are to current issues.

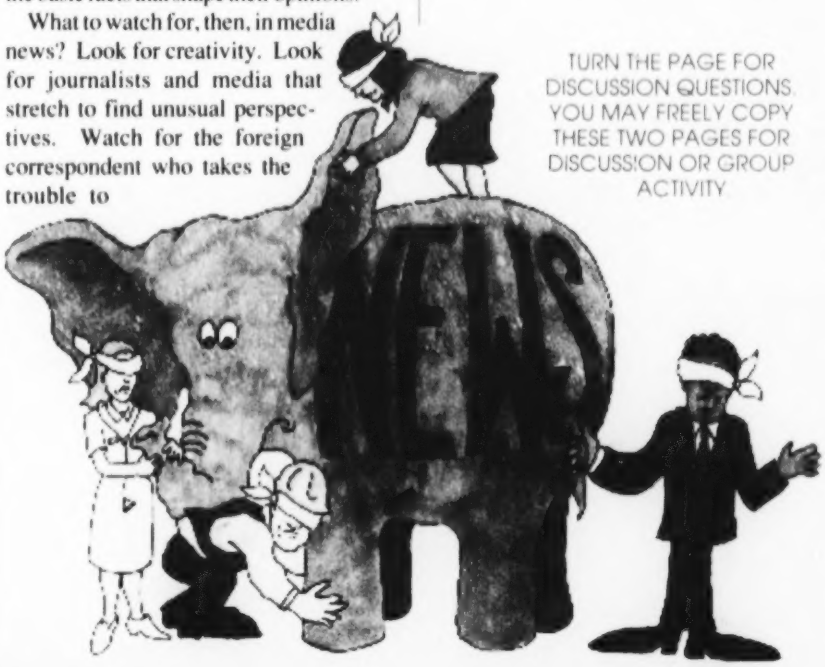
The limits of objectivity make the search for alternative viewpoints crucial. Still, there's no doubt that in the immediate future, most readers, viewers and listeners will depend on mainstream media for the basic facts that shape their opinions.

What to watch for, then, in media news? Look for creativity. Look for journalists and media that stretch to find unusual perspectives. Watch for the foreign correspondent who takes the trouble to interview refugees when another power invades their country. Pay attention to the broadcaster who takes precious time to explore the history of the debate over rights, pointing out how today's opinions echo historical questions. Read the writer whose editorial on nuclear energy in Tennessee includes an interview with an elderly Appalachian trout fisherman who remembers what the fish were like before the power plant was built.

Journalists are well aware that any story will change with the number of people interviewed, but not enough of them follow this principle on all stories. Those who go the extra mile are worth watching for. A truly effective journalist shouldn't be satisfied with the views of the experts. Neither should media consumers.

Jay Davis is the membership coordinator for the Center for Media and Values.

TURN THE PAGE FOR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS. YOU MAY FREELY COPY THESE TWO PAGES FOR DISCUSSION OR GROUP ACTIVITY



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How to Anaylze a News Story: Eight Guidelines for Reading Between the Lines

1. Compare headlines and story content. Headlines are probably the most important aspect of news stories. Most people "shop" headlines to determine which articles to read. After reading an article, propose alternative headlines that emphasize different facts.

- *How accurately does the actual headline encapsulate the article? Does the headline slant one's reading of the article?*

2. Identify politically-charged labels, adjectives, and verbs. Word choices can help identify reporters' biases. Have your family or group read an article and list words that seem politically charged. For example:

- *Are the contras called "freedom fighters?" Are those who support abortion rights called "abortion activists" or "pro-choice activists?" What connotation does the word "activist" imply? Why?*

3. Question the hidden agenda of suspicious sources. Sometimes reporters need to speak with sources "off the record." Often, however, sources use their anonymity to further their own agendas.

- *When a reporter cites "top U.S. officials," "company informants," or other anonymous sources, whose position is left out? What ulterior motive might a source have?*

4. Consider whether the placement of ideas and sources affects story impact. Try cutting apart a newspaper article and pasting it back together in a different order.

- *Does the tenor of the article change when dissenting opinions become the lead? Whose position is stressed by the original arrangement of the story?*

5. Look for non-white, non-male perspectives. North American media rely heavily on white, male officials for their news.

- *How does the news change when seen from the perspective of women or other races?*

For a class or group project, have group members tally the sex and race of sources cited in a television, radio or print report.

- *How many are white and male? How many are females or people of color?*

6. Compare photographs and photo captions to the news stories connected with them. Manipulation of digital images is not the only way to change the meaning of a picture. As with headlines, readers "shop" a newspaper by scanning pictures and reading captions — whether or not they read the associated articles.

- *Are photographs and their captions faithful to the articles connected with them? How does a picture or caption influence the meaning of an article?*

7. Compare news stories to common sense. Be aware of obvious misstatements of facts that defy common sense. In the aftermath of the Exxon oil spill, one article stated that much of the oil spill "is gone, most by natural action."

- *So where did it go? Did it evaporate — or is it now mixed with billions of gallons of water?*

8. Be suspicious of polls and statistics. Polling data and statistics are notoriously deceptive.

- *Ask "which perspective does this data seem to support?" Then try rearranging the same data so that it presents a different perspective.*

Illustration by E. Skultin.

Adapted from chapter three, "Media Con Games: How to See Through Them," in Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media, *by Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon. See Resources, page 23, for details.*

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Media&Values is a project of the Center for Media and Values, a non-profit educational organization to promote thoughtful awareness and better use of television and mass media. Membership is $30/year and includes *Media&Values* magazine. Additional contributions are tax-deductible.

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WATCH, READ, LISTEN

Resources for Follow-up

IN PRINT

• ***Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*** by Doris A. Graber, 1984, reports a year-long study on how people seek out, understand and utilize information presented in the news. Addison-Wesley/ Longman Inc., 1 Jacob Way, Reading, MA 01867, (800)447-2226, $20.50.

• ***"Journal of Mass Media Ethics."*** The Fall 1988 issue includes issues involved in AIDS coverage, the ethical implications of digital imaging, surreptitious taping, and more. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 365 Broadway, Hillsdale, NJ 07642, (201)666-4110, $6.50, annual subscription $14.

• ***The Media Elite: America's New Powerbrokers***. S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, Linda S. Lichter report on their study of 240 journalists highlighting their backgrounds, habits and attitudes on social issues, comparing their media coverage with the views of experts, 1986. Hastings House, 5 West 19th Street, New York, NY 10011, (212)727-7114, $12.95.

• ***TV News and Children***. An excellent booklet designed to help young viewers process and learn about television news is available from Action For Children's Television, 20 University Road, Cambridge, MA 02138, (617)876-6620, $5.

• ***A History of News: From the Drum to the Satellite.*** Mitchell Stephens shows how the need to gather and spread news has existed since the beginning of civilization. 1989, Penguin Books, Box 120, Bergenfield, NJ 07621, (800)526-0275, $9.95.

• ***The Decision-Making Process in Journalism*** by Carl Hausman. Interviews with experienced journalists provide guidance to help the reader learn from their experiences, 1990. Nelson-Hall Publishers, 111 N. Canal Street, Chicago, IL 60606, (312)930-9446, $11.95.

• ***"The Business of News,"*** a *Gannett Center Journal*, Spring 1987, discusses the two central functions of America's mass media — the dissemination of news and information and the marketing of goods and services. Gannett Center for Media Studies, Columbia University, Financial Dept., 2950 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, $5.

• ***Reading the News*** by Michael Schudson collects essays by six working journalists, press critics and scholars at the leading edge of media criticism. Pantheon Press, 201 E. 50th Street, 27th floor, New York, NY 10022, (800)733-3000, $9.95.

• ***Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media*** by Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon is a comprehensive analysis of bias in the corporately-owned press and how it affects coverage of a wide range of issues. Carol Communications, 600 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022, (212)486-2200, $19.95, available June 1990.

• ***Behind the Front Page: A Candid Look at How the News is Made.*** David S. Broder examines tough ethical questions at the heart of journalism today, 1987. Touchstone (Simon & Schuster), 200 Old Tappan Road, Old Tappan, NJ 07675, (201)767-5937, $8.95.

• ***Press Watch: A Provocative Look at How Newspapers Report the News*** by David Shaw, 1984, looks at what really goes into a newspaper news section. Macmillan Publishing Company, Front & Brown Streets, Riverside, NJ 08075, (800)257-5755, $15.95.

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• ***Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek & Time.*** Herbert J. Gans' classic 1979 study analyzes the professional standards and external pressures that shape news judgments. Vintage Books, 201 E. 50th Street, 28th Floor, New York, NY 10022, (800)733-3000, $9.95.

• ***The Uncensored War*** by Daniel C. Hallin is a case study of the media's coverage of Vietnam, 1986. Oxford University Press, 1600 Pollitt Drive, Fairlawn, NJ 07410, (800)451-7556, $24.95.

• ***The News At Any Cost: How Journalists Compromise Their Ethics to Shape the News.*** Tom Goldstein examines the way the press gathers the news, 1985. See page 16. Simon & Schuster, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; check your library.

SIGHT/SOUND

• ***"Making The News Fit"*** evaluates American news coverage of El Salvador from 1980-85 helping viewers to understand the role of the media in the events shaping that country, 28 minutes, VHS rental $50.

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The above films are available from The Cinema Guild, 697 Broadway, Suite 802, New York, NY 10019, (212)246-5522.

• ***"The World Is Watching"*** examines the news making and gathering process by alternately focusing on several journalists working in Nicaragua and their editors back in the U.S., 58 minutes. First Run/Icarus Films, 153 Waverly Place, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10014, (212)243-0600, VHS rental $75. ***"Only The News That Fits"*** is a 28 minute version, VHS rental $50.

MAKE A MOVE to Media Awareness

By Elizabeth Thoman, Editor

We're growing. *Media&Values*, the magazine, is now the cornerstone of the Center for Media and Values. Our new corporate identity is providing the infrastructure to launch a media awareness movement for the 1990s. *Media&Values*, the "leading resource for media awareness education," is becoming the resource for *leading* media awareness education in the United States.

This, our fiftieth issue, shatters the myth of news as the unbiased reporting of facts. Confronted by this reality, we cannot remain passive to the growing influence of all media as entertainment. Surrounded by an overwhelming amount of media input, the need for a media awareness movement in our own lives and in society at large could not be more clear. The nagging sense within each of us that we have become pawns in a game of media manipulation leads us to stop complaining and to begin training ourselves and others in awareness, analysis, reflection — and action.

Our commitment to developing a movement for media awareness education provides whole new challenges and needs. Whether you are a friend and subscriber or a first-time reader of *Media&Values*, we need YOU to take this step with us. We need you as members, as leaders, as builders to create a square for "awareness" in today's media game. Here are some ways you can join us on the leading edge of this movement:

- **Become a member!** see the inside front cover for membership categories and costs.
- **Stop complaining and start *looking*,** really analyzing what you see, hear and read. Talk to your friends, family and co-workers to get them looking, too.
- **Become involved in media awareness education.** Use the Media and Values Workshop Kit for this issue (see index page for details) to prepare a program on "News for the '90s: A Question of Values" for your club or organization. Or organize an ongoing reflection/action group in your church/synagogue, library or community center.
- **Contribute your time, talent and resources** — locally and nationally — to sustain and expand *Media&Values* and the new Center for Media and Values. Write or call us to get free membership brochures to spread the word and build the movement. Consider your own financial contribution or, if possible, co-sponsorship in a future issue or a grant for additional workshop kits, videos and other teaching tools.

Co-sponsors contribute gifts of $500 - $5,000 to develop and distribute each provocative issue of *Media&Values*. Help us keep raising a voice for values with a co-sponsorship from you or your organization for #51/*Media and the Environment*; #52/*Media and Children*; #53/*Media and Addiction*.

If tomorrow's media is going to be more than just a game, we must all become better players.

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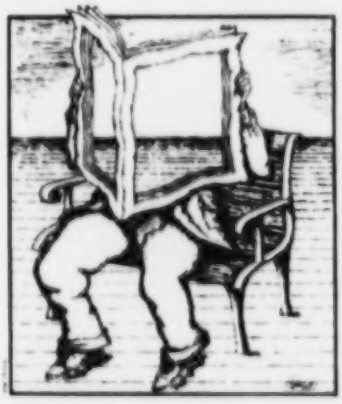

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